



# **Natomas Oral Histories**

## **2015/027**

Oral interview of

**Virginia Bennett Harder**

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**Anne:** It is Saturday morning, March 31, 2001. We are in the home of Virginia Bennett Harder. She has invited us here to share in the memories that she has of growing up in Natomas. I'll just turn it over to you by asking what are some early memories you have, even maybe before your time or your family's time, about the Natomas area?

**Virginia:** My grandfather, who died before I was born, was on the board of trustees of the Natomas Company. My father was born up in Sutter County not too far from Natomas. Actually, they lived on the corner of Powerline Road and Sankey Road, which is just above the Metropolitan Airport. My brother and his wife live there now.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** I don't know the exact years, but my grandfather was involved with the Natomas Company for several years. My father was in the first World War. He was in France from July 1918 until January or February of 1919. When he came home, my grandfather had sold the land he owned in Sutter County and had bought three if not four lots along the Sacramento River just upstream from the Powerline Road. I've seen the map showing that down at the Discovery Museum years ago. It shows my grandfather's plot and my father's. He bought at least two, one for my father and one for my father's brother. But he had two brothers, so he may have bought a third.

**Anne:** Interesting. We'll try to get a copy of that map.

**Virginia:** They farmed there together with the parents until their marriage. My grandfather died very suddenly, just two weeks before my parents were married. My parents lived with his mother for a while, and then his older brother, who had a small home farther up river on his plot, came to live on the property.

**Anne:** What was his name?

**Virginia:** Chester. We called him Ted — it was his nickname.

**Anne:** Ok. What was your dad's name?

**Virginia:** Raymond.

**Anne:** Oh, Raymond.

**Virginia:** Uncle Ted's wife died in childbirth, so he came back to live with his mother, and my parents moved his little home from where it was onto my father's property and added on to it a little bit. That was where we lived then.

**Anne:** Was the child with him then?

**Virginia:** No, they both died at that time.

**Anne:** Difficult.

**Virginia:** My earliest memory of growing up in that area is when my younger brother was born. It is just a brief memory. I was about 3 years old. We went to Mercy Hospital, which then was called Sister's Hospital.

**Anne:** Sister's, oh Sister's Hospital. So is that Mercy General?

**Virginia:** Yes.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** Then I have other just fleeting memories from out there. In those days, we were fairly isolated. My grandmother was living next door to us, which was about two football fields length away.

**Anne:** "Right next door." Funny.

**Virginia:** Yes, right next door. My older brother — I had an older brother who was three years older than I — died the year I started school. He started to school, in the turkey shed, before me and then died when he was nine. I went to the American Basin School.

**Anne:** What was this brother's name?

**Virginia:** Raymond. Raymond Jr.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** As you may have heard from some of the others you have interviewed, things were not easy for farmers in the '30s. They were not easy for anyone in the '30s. Farmers had struggled even in the '20s, so the Depression as such was not really that much of a blow to the farmers.

**Anne:** You were already living the lifestyle.

**Virginia:** Right. We were all pretty poor. I liked school. I liked having lots of other kids to play with. Most of them were from families that I knew of, if not had seen a lot of as I was growing up.

**Anne:** Who were some of these children?

**Virginia:** Well, the Lauppes — Burton was a couple of years ahead of me, but I knew them. The Willeys — Mr. Willey I saw here and there. He was with the Natomas Company. I started school with Betty Willey. Ed, her brother, was a few years older than we were. I have some pictures here.

**Anne:** Oh, you have some pictures.

**Virginia:** Yes. This is a picture that was taken about the time my older brother got sick. It is dated February 1933, and his birthday was in February, and I remember he got sick right after his birthday and died in June. My mother would bring him back and forth to Sister's Hospital, so he wasn't in the picture. This is Burton.

**Anne:** Oh, Burton Lauppe. Look at that.

**Virginia:** This is Ed Willey. It just flabbergasts me looking at this because so many of these people are dead.

**Anne:** Oh, yes.

**Virginia:** This is my teacher, Mrs. Shaul. She had the first through the fourth grades. I had her for the first four years and then again for the eighth grade.

**Anne:** Is it spelled S-c-h-a-l-l?

**Virginia:** S-h-a-u-l. Her first name was Phoebe. She was a great teacher, she really was, and a great friend. That was one of the things about going to such a small rural school. As far as I was concerned, it was almost like a large family, looking back on it. The teachers were almost like friends.

**Anne:** I can understand that. Who is the other adult standing here?

**Virginia:** That is the other teacher. We called it the “little room” and the “big room.”

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** Her name escapes me because she was gone by the time I got up into the classes she taught. This must have been her last year.

**Anne:** You are standing in front of the—

**Virginia:** This was the porch of the American Basin School where the “big room” was.

**Anne:** The location of this spot now is where?

**Virginia:** It was located up on Elkhorn Boulevard, a little bit south of where the control tower for the Metro Airport is now.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** If you are on Elkhorn and you look directly toward the river and in your mind’s eye make a cross, that is about where it was.

**Anne:** Oh. Very interesting. Beautiful picture. Is that something you would let us take a copy of?

**Virginia:** Yes, if you would promise to give it right back.

**Anne:** Oh, we would.

**Virginia:** These photos are subsequent pictures. This was ’33, ’34. There is Burton. Here is Ed Willey. Here is Mrs. Solander, or Miss Haenggi at the time. I think she was Finnish.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** I think this is Delores Ferreira.

**Anne:** Yes, that does look like her.

**Virginia:** This is Vera Hurt Haines. She lives out in Carmichael.

**Anne:** Oh, she does?

**Virginia:** She is a few years older than I am. If you don't have her name, you should get a hold of her because I'm sure she could fill in more details.

**Anne:** We'll have to get her number and call her. Thank you.

**Virginia:** Hiram Huffman — his brother was married to Burton's sister. Then we see Mrs. Shaul again. This is Ed Willey. I must have been absent that day.

**Anne:** So now this particular picture — what is the range in age of the students?

**Virginia:** First grade to eighth. Those are the students in the whole school.

**Anne:** I'm just counting how many total students. It looks like approximately 33 students. Does that sound right?

**Virginia:** It seems that when I graduated we were down to about 25.

**Anne:** Imagine that. I'm looking here and seeing what looks to be an Asian child and here there might be a Hispanic student

**Virginia:** This is Manuel Rosa.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** He is Portuguese. The Ferreiros were Portuguese. More lived in the lower end of Natomas and went to Jefferson School. The Rosas and the Ferreiros — the Ferreiros particularly were a good-sized family.

**Anne:** Do you remember the last names of others in your class?

**Virginia:** I don't remember by sight these children and I'm not sure, but they appear to me to be Japanese, at least this boy does. I know there was a Japanese family in that area, but they moved away before I got there. They were long gone before the war started. I think they moved to Citrus Heights or somewhere over there. I know they were in a relocation camp. I met them at one of our reunions.

**Anne:** These two almost look like twins.

**Virginia:** They look a lot alike. This one is Jerry Danielson. He was in my class in first grade. His brother would not have been in school, his half-brother. He was two if not four years younger and would not be in this picture.

**Anne:** Oh. Ok. How nice everyone looks sitting in those little wooden chairs.

**Virginia:** Now this next one—

**Anne:** Oh, there you are. How nice.

**Virginia:** Mrs. Shaul, Ed, Burton—

**Anne:** Oh, that smile looks like Burton.

**Virginia:** Russell Lowell, he lives down in Fresno, or somewhere in that area now. This is Mr. Comstock. He drove sort of a homemade bus for us. Delores is here. This the youngest Ferreira boy, Delores' brother Alfred. I think this was a Japanese boy named Junji, which was his first name. I can't remember his last name. Again, he left the area before the war started.

**Anne:** That picture is great. I heard mention of that makeshift bus.

**Virginia:** It held about eight or ten of us at one time.

**Anne:** That is good.

**Virginia:** We were segregated. The boys had their part of the bus and the girls had theirs. This picture is of the school in '36. It is really the biggest student body we ever had when I was going to school. I'll be politically incorrect, but a group of "pea pickers" came and had several children who went to our school for two or three weeks. They were camped in a vacant pasture down the road from the school. It was a typical migrant situation. Sometimes the kids would come to school and sometimes they wouldn't. The girls were more apt to come nearly every day than the boys were. But, I was so excited about it because we then could have two baseball teams.

**Anne:** Isn't that wonderful!

**Virginia:** That was really great! It was new people to get acquainted with, too.

**Anne:** Now the "pea pickers," when you say that what I'm thinking is that, number one, you were growing peas and—

**Virginia:** Well, I think we may have been growing peas at that time, but we called them "pea pickers" because that was what we called them. They were migrant workers. I couldn't tell you exactly what they were picking.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** They were there for a relatively short period of time.

**Anne:** What other crops could they have been picking?

**Virginia:** You'll have to ask Burton. I know there were a variety of crops grown in the area. I really could not tell you specifically what they were.

**Anne:** Sure. So this is a big group in this photo.

**Virginia:** This is Burton, Ferreira, Mrs. Haenggi, Delores—

**Anne:** Her sister Marguerite — isn't that her name?

**Virginia:** Delores does have two older sisters, Mary and Marguerite. I do not remember that they ever went to school with us. They are not in this picture.

**Anne:** Oh, ok.

**Virginia:** I don't know if they moved into town, or if they were out of school by this time. I just don't remember.

**Anne:** These are wonderful pictures.

**Virginia:** We look like a motley crew.

**Anne:** You look like a typical classroom of students to me.

**Virginia:** Now on this one, here I am. I wonder if Betty is in this one. Although she started out in the first grade with me, they moved to the other side of the line and then she went to Jefferson. Ed likewise.

**Anne:** These are great! What memories can you remember about life in school? What sticks out in your mind as far as incidences or events?

**Virginia:** Oh, let's see. Generally, for recess, the smaller kids played on their side of the school and the older kids would play on our side. Often we would play a form of baseball depending on how many people there were.

**Anne:** Right.

**Virginia:** We played some games that we had names for, which haven't survived. We did play dodgeball, which has survived intact and that was in the schoolyard, which was not paved but just hard packed dirt. Morning and afternoon recess, generally the older and younger kids were separated. Part of the reason was I think that our recess was at a slightly different time. At lunchtime, we were more or less together as we sat and ate our sack lunches.

**Anne:** What might have been a typical sack lunch?

**Virginia:** Peanut butter and what else. Looking back on it I don't think we had perishable kinds of things.

**Anne:** What about school outings? Do you have any memories of being connected with 4-H?

**Virginia:** Oh yes, I started that when I was 10. I did some sewing and gradually got into other things. There were so few kids in the group as a whole where I lived that I think they finally gave up on the sewing. There just were not enough girls. Then we were put with the boys and raised animals. I raised a calf.

**Anne:** You did! Did your calf have a name?

**Virginia:** No. I raised her and then sold her to one of the local farmers. I understand she was a great milker.

**Anne:** Wonderful!

**Virginia:** When I was 12 and 13, a lot of our social life revolved around 4-H, at least for the kids that were in it. The Inderkums had the dairy and the wherewithal to make it possible for us to do things. When we went for a hayride, we went in a truck, not on a wagon.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** I remember one ride in a truck, anyway, after I started high school at Grant.

**Anne:** You mentioned going to high school at Grant. Didn't they have a swimming pool? Did you use that?

**Virginia:** Oh, yes. They had an Olympic-size pool. It was very nice. Grant was a fairly new building. I think the building that is there now was built in 1936. They had a lovely pool. McClatchy and Sacramento were the only other high schools in the immediate area. The other schools did not have a pool available and would use Hughes Stadium for football.

**Anne:** Were there tournaments between the three schools?

**Virginia:** For football yes, we played on the same league. We played San Juan High School and we played Christian Brothers. They were such small schools that I don't think they were really considered a part of the league due to numbers. We had a larger circle in regards to basketball. I don't know if you really want to hear about that.

**Anne:** Whatever you would like to share is fine.

**Virginia:** I started high school in 1940 and graduated in 1944 so most of that was taken up with the war. This put a rather serious crimp on places that we were able to go and other things that we were able to do. I was aware of the fact that however it was worked out, the school was very generous with places they would take the students, especially before the war broke out. When I was in high school, they had a spring contest for the music department up in Chico. I did go to that.

**Anne:** Did you play?

**Virginia:** I played piano.

**Anne:** Piano, oh nice.



**Virginia:** We had a very good music department. The band was good and we had a girls' chorus that was good. They would take all six buses, fill them up, and drive up to Chico.

**Anne:** Very nice.

**Virginia:** The war changed how much traveling we could do however.

**Anne:** I'm sure it did, and that was for most of the time that you were in high school.

**Virginia:** Yes. I was aware of the fact that we didn't get to do things that previous classes had. Everyone was focused on the war and the war effort.

**Anne:** Yes. It was the American duty.

**Virginia:** Our basic education was excellent. I remember at one of the reunions, a classmate was talking about how after a student finished with Mrs. Shaul, they could always read.

**Anne:** Isn't that a nice compliment.

**Virginia:** Yes. We were drilled in phonics. It was dull, no question, but it paid off. Now I guess they don't do much of that.

**Anne:** Was English the spoken language?

**Virginia:** Yes. I don't remember there ever being a problem with language.

**Anne:** So, reviewing for myself, you went to American Basin from first through the eighth grade, and then you went to Grant.

**Virginia:** Grant from 9th through 12th.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Anne:** Virginia, we were talking about entertainment in Natomas and I was asking you if you recall anything about a dance floor that had been up on the Inderkum property for a while. You were recalling that the dance floor had been closed due to someone breaking or twisting an ankle or something, but that the snack shed had been relocated onto your property. Did I understand that correctly?

**Virginia:** It had been my grandmother's property and was next door to ours. My father's brother Clifford and family were living there at the time. It was used for a playhouse and a storehouse for a while. It was very small, probably the size of a large closet in a home of today.

**Anne:** Perfect to play in. It had this window you were saying that you would hold open with a stick, where they dispensed the food previously.

**Virginia:** I'm sure at the time I didn't know that that is what it was. It was just something that was there. I don't know if my uncle had been involved in serving the food and thus had some claim to it or what.

**Anne:** Right. Exactly.

**Virginia:** So as far as I know they just dismantled the dance floor.

**Anne:** How about the Elkhorn Ferry. Do you have memories of that?

**Virginia:** Many, many memories of that. My mother's mother lived in Woodland. My mother was raised in Woodland and we used to go see my grandmother at least once a month. We would always take the ferry. We would drive up. Our house was just down a quarter of a mile from Powerline Road and the ferry was about three or four miles further. So, we took the ferry across and drove to Woodland.

**Anne:** So, when you would take the ferry across, would you be sitting in your car?

**Virginia:** I don't remember, particularly when we were young, ever getting out of the car.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** For one thing, it was pretty close quarters. If there were four cars, which was all the ferry would hold, it really was rather difficult to do anything but stay in the car. It didn't take very long either. I do remember one time when I guess we had a particularly heavy winter that the ferry couldn't run because the river was so high. We really wanted to go to Woodland because we hadn't seen them for quite some time. My father drove us up to the ferry, the ferryman rowed a rowboat across the river — he lived on the Yolo County side in a little house there — picked my mother, my brother, and me up and rowed us back across the river. I don't remember being frightened, but it was a pretty long and choppy crossing because the river was so wide. Then we caught the train — the Sacramento Northern was still running then in Sacramento and it went right by the ferry. We flagged down the train and took that on into Woodland. I think that my father probably went around to Woodland by Sacramento and picked us up. He would have had to go in those days quite a ways out to get there. I don't remember going back that same way, so somehow he must have come for us.

**Anne:** What was the family name of your mother's side of the family that you were visiting?

**Virginia:** Nelk. My grandmother and grandfather were from Europe. My grandmother was from Switzerland, the German-speaking part, and he was from Kassel. They met over here and got married in 1885, I believe.

**Anne:** What were they doing in Woodland?

**Virginia:** My grandmother came over to the USA because she had an uncle in Sacramento, I think. He had a business of some kind. I don't know if it was before she came over or after, but a sister and a half-sister were also here. I don't know much, nothing virtually, about my grandfather's history. My grandmother was not terribly fond of her brother-in-law. I know he had several brothers. They spoke English by the time my mother had memories. She was the youngest of four. They spoke German up until the time her oldest brother started school. He was very embarrassed because he couldn't speak English at all. Woodland had a lot of German people.

**Anne:** Oh, did they? I work in Woodland now, so this is interesting to hear about.

**Virginia:** They had a church they went to where the pastor spoke German.

**Anne:** A prerequisite was that you needed to speak German. That is good.

**Anne:** You have some more memories about Natomas entertainment.

**Virginia:** Yes. Natomas was, by today's standards, very sparsely settled. There were three homes on the riverbank just downriver from us. The Parkinsons lived near the Powerline Road. Their home was built on a mound that was connected to the levee so there was no need for stilts or an elevated walkway. If you have been out there you know the riverbank in many places is quite deep. Mr. Truxel lived further downstream. His home required a walkway to get to it. Another house was next to it, which was probably owned by the Natomas Company.

**Anne:** Yes.

**Virginia:** Many people live along there now. They are lovely, lovely homes.

**Anne:** Right.

**Virginia:** Nobody lived on the riverbank. There was this house that Mr. Truxel had and then rented it out. I guess people couldn't afford to build there. You had to either build on a mound of dirt or build on pilings because the river overflowed the banks all the time.

**Anne:** Oh, that's right.

**Virginia:** So nobody did. My father called it free land. He put the cow to graze over there, and horses.

**Kathleen Jensen:** I have been doing some research on Mr. Truxel. Could you describe where this house was?

**Virginia:** It was upriver from the Inderkums by about a quarter of a mile.

**Anne:** Is the structure still there?

**Virginia:** Oh no. It went down a long time ago when people came out and started building. I do remember that you had to walk this plank that was about a foot wide and it was probably forty feet long. In a couple of places it had supports or vertical poles that gave it support, but there were sections when you walked on it, even when I was young and much lighter, that it would sort of give and move.

**Anne:** It didn't have sides?

**Virginia:** Oh, no, no, no.

**Anne:** It was this plain wooden thing with no sides, wow.

**Virginia:** I remember that it took me a while to get up the nerve to just walk to the first vertical poles, which were not very far.

**Anne:** Yes, I can imagine that.

**Virginia:** It took me a while before I got the nerve to walk the whole thing. He owned it, but also rented it out, because a girlfriend of mine and her parents lived there for a short period of time.

**Anne:** The only house on that side of the Garden Highway.

**Virginia:** At least as far as I remember from where we lived.

**Kathleen:** Oh, thank you.

**Virginia:** It wasn't just the 4-H club that was a source of social activity. It was the Farm Bureau and the Home Department.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** You know, the Women's Department was the female part of the Farm Bureau.

**Anne:** No, I didn't know that.

**Virginia:** Well, it was quite a structure. There was the woman hired by the county who was called the "Home Advisor." Maybe she came out of UC Davis Extension. Anyway, she was the lady who came out and organized each center. There was quite a network of these centers. My mother and the other women would arrange for her to come and show them how to cook, how to can, how to budget their money, etcetera.

**Anne:** How large might a group be?

**Virginia:** Well, just the women in the area who could make it. Some attended regularly and some didn't attend much at all. The men had their meetings. The American Basin School was the only reasonably large structure in our area of North Natomas — the meetings were held there.

**Anne:** Oh, they were.

**Virginia:** That was also where the elections were held. Everybody came to American Basin for the Farm Bureau meetings. Another thing we had during the winter when the men didn't work, because everybody farmed — there were less than a handful of families of people who lived out in that area in those years who did not farm, so we used to have card parties.

**Anne:** Oh. Fun!

**Virginia:** Did you ever hear about the card parties?

**Anne:** Oh, no I haven't yet. This is wonderful.

**Virginia:** Well, virtually every winter, January and February when nothing was going on on the farm, we would have anywhere from one to three card parties at American Basin. They were whist parties.

**Anne:** Oh.

**Virginia:** You paid 25 cents to play. Somebody would say, “Clubs are going to be trump this round,” and you would play. A person would come around afterwards and mark your scorecard and then we changed tables. Some people moved up and some people moved down so you played with different people each time. It all worked out. People brought prizes for a raffle. It was a money-raising event. The 4-H sponsored some and Home Department some. The dates they were held, who ran them, was decided by whatever organization was sponsoring it. We would even have people who would come out from town. We would have a meeting, play cards, and then at the end of the meeting distribute the prizes. It started with the person who had the highest score. They got to pick first. I shouldn’t say it was a raffle. I don’t think it was.

**Anne:** What fun!

**Virginia:** I thought it was a blast!

**Anne:** Now when you say “whist,” how is that word spelled?

**Virginia:** W-H-I-S-T. It is a very old game.

**Anne:** Oh, it is?

**Kathleen:** Yes, I know a similar game.

**Anne:** You’ve heard of whist?

**Virginia:** It is played just the same as bridge except there is no bidding and you don’t have a dummy. It is a partnership game. A nonplayer decides the trump at the beginning of play.

**Anne:** Oh, what fun! So, these card games were a happening here.

**Virginia:** Some people took it very, very seriously.

**Anne:** What a nice gathering. Everybody would get together for some fun. You mentioned that most people in Natomas farmed, I have heard that some people here worked in canneries also. Can you speak to that?

**Virginia:** There were a few single women who lived in Natomas who worked in the canneries. The closest one was on Richards Boulevard, which did not look anything like Richards Boulevard looks nowadays. The next closest was on Stockton Boulevard and Alhambra, Libby’s. Those are the only two that come to mind.

**Anne:** I’ve also heard that some people in Natomas worked for the railroad. Do you have any memories of people you knew working for the railroad? You mentioned earlier traveling by the Sacramento Northern, and wasn’t there also the Union Pacific?

**Virginia:** Sacramento Northern was a light-rail kind of thing. It was a train, but it wasn't like the Southern Pacific or the Union Pacific. I cannot think of anybody who lived out where we did that worked for the railroad.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** I know there was one family that lived near the school — the wife worked in town at a clothing store, and he, I think, sold insurance. They didn't have any children. She always waved to us when she went to work in the morning.

**Anne:** Oh, very nice. She might not have been a whist player?

**Virginia:** I don't remember her at any of the games, but I couldn't swear to it.

**Anne:** These were gathering opportunities for the farmers. Were there other times when the farmers gathered to help each other out?

**Virginia:** I think there was a lot of that, too. It depended of course on what crop you were growing. I was thinking of the crops that we had. My first memory of what we grew was that of having a peach orchard. Prior to that, my father, his mother, and his two brothers were in business together until she died. They did everything together. It was torn out when I was very young. I don't remember in which order these crops were raised, but in various years we raised beans, dry kidney beans, we also had peas, alfalfa, and sugar beets.

**Anne:** Where would the harvested crop go once it was harvested?

**Virginia:** I don't know what would happen to the crop, because it was never a great interest of mine.

**Anne:** Sure, I can understand that.

**Virginia:** I remember one time of going down to Menlo Park or perhaps it was San Jose and watching them load hampers of peas and chipped ice going into refrigerated railroad cars.

**Anne:** Your memory then was that they were sending them off to market somewhere. Certainly after the Transcontinental Railroad went through, many crops were shipped this way.

**Kathleen:** The Railroad Museum has a car on display that was used for that purpose.

**Virginia:** I recently had my memory refreshed regarding Steinbeck and what went on in the Salinas area. In the Steinbeck Museum, they discussed how essential that kind of transport was to the growers in that region to reach a wider market. All of that went on around me.

**Anne:** Someone was taking care of that You didn't need to focus on it. We jumped now to recollections about school transportation while we were off tape.

**Virginia:** First, my parents had to take me to school. Then Mr. Comstock took me. Then Mr. Rutherford, who was the principal at the high school, would send his limousine out to pick up the kids. By the time I was in the eighth grade, the Grant bus would come to Natomas, make a big circle to pick up the high

school kids and at the same time the grammar kids would get on and ride it to American Basin. After they got off, a group of Grant High School kids would get on. It would also stop at Jefferson and do the same thing. It was a long bus ride. It was at least a 45-minute bus ride on the end of each day.

**Anne:** You were telling us about going to high school at Grant. What did you do after high school?

**Virginia:** I always wanted to be a nurse. I might have been rather strongly influenced by the fact that ever since I was five or six years old we had a fair amount of contact with the hospital. My older brother and my younger brother were in the hospital. Living out in the country, there was not a lot of exposure to anything like that, so that probably influenced my decision.

**Anne:** That's right.

**Virginia:** So, I always had that in my mind. My father always wanted me to be a teacher — his sister was a teacher and he thought it was a great life. Nursing was my goal and that was what I became.

**Anne:** So, you went to high school and then—

**Virginia:** I went to Grant and then went to a junior college, what was then Sacramento College, which is Sacramento City College now, for two years. It was in a transition phase at the time. They wanted to differentiate it from Sacramento State College.

**Anne:** Did you live there?

**Virginia:** Oh no.

**Anne:** So you commuted from Natomas?

**Virginia:** Yes. Perhaps you know the Novaks. Betty and her sister Marge — their maiden name was Jones — worked in town. We took turns driving back and forth. There was another man, Mr. Parkinson, who lived in the area too. Regardless of what my hours were at school, it was an 8 am to 5 pm thing because that was what they all worked.

**Anne:** You fit whatever classes you needed in those hours.

**Virginia:** Then I went to San Francisco to Stanford Hospital and spent three years there. I graduated in 1949 and met my husband, got married, and stayed down there.

**Anne:** Oh, you did? Interesting. So, but you are here now.

**Virginia:** Well, he died in '67.

**Anne:** I'm sorry.

**Virginia:** There really wasn't anything down there that I would stay for. I really wanted to work in public health and at the time I had a much better chance of getting a job up here than down there. I wanted to come back here to be with my family.

**Anne:** Sure. So then did you find a job here?

**Virginia:** Yes, I went to work for Sacramento County and worked there for 14 years, and then I went over and worked in Woodland.

**Anne:** So, you know the corner I work on, Cottonwood and West Beamer.

**Virginia:** Oh, yes, quite intimately.

**Anne:** Well, I'm still going up there.

**Virginia:** What department do you work in?

**Anne:** I'm an occupational therapist working for Yolo County Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Services, in an intensive day treatment program called Stepping Stones. Getting back to memories of Natomas, you were mentioning about what you and your siblings would do when your parents would need to go away for an evening.

**Virginia:** When I was quite little, two or three periods of time when my mother was in the hospital, a hired woman came and stayed, moved in. My father was around, though, a fair amount. He would be in and out. I was around 8, 9, or 10 years old the first time I remember my parents going out and having Mrs. Vogel, who lived next door to American Basin, come over and stay with us. There was one thing that this reminded me of, as far as people working around the house. It was not at all unusual to have what we called hoboos walking up and down the highway. If they came at mealtimes, they were usually there with an offer to work. My father would find something for them to do in the garden before then giving them a meal. This didn't happen every day but fairly often.

**Anne:** People felt it was a fair exchange.

**Virginia:** Yes.

**Anne:** Do you have memories of Hooverville?

**Virginia:** Oh yes. We passed it every time we went into town. The bridge that went over Discovery Park used to stretch all the way into town and Hooverville was under that. It stretched quite a ways in that area. It was very obvious.

**Anne:** I was thinking that it was at the junction of Northgate and the Garden Highway.

**Virginia:** It might have extended that far.

**Anne:** Isn't that interesting.

**Virginia:** Because until I started high school I don't remember hardly ever going that far over to Northgate because we always turned off to head over to Grant.

**Anne:** Right. Now thinking a bit about your comment about going into town makes me wonder where you did your shopping. What stores did your mother use?



**Virginia:** There was a Hales and Weinstocks that were our primary department stores. We had specialty shoes stores and that kind of thing along on K Street.

**Anne:** Now were both Hales and Weinstocks where you would go for clothing items?

**Virginia:** Yes.

**Anne:** Where would you go for grocery items then?

**Virginia:** Most often we would shop at a Safeway store, which was at 12th and D streets. At that time, 12th Street was a two-way street.

**Anne:** Ok.

**Virginia:** We would go home that way so we could stop at Safeway on the way home if we needed to. The Public Market on J Street was a place we would shop at occasionally.

**Anne:** Oh really?

**Virginia:** We would go to town almost every Saturday except during the summer. I took music lessons, so every Saturday I would be driven to town to have my lesson. Oh, by the way Burton and I had the same teacher. We would play duets together.

**Anne:** Oh, that is great. So, who was your teacher?

**Virginia:** Her name was Mrs. Faustman. They lived on 22nd and D, I believe. Later on, around the time I stopped taking lessons, when I was about 15, they moved south to the Land Park area.

**Anne:** Do you recall at all a little grocery store called American Market that was on West El Camino and American Way?

**Virginia:** I don't remember that West El Camino was even there, certainly not in the form it is now. That started when it got to Northgate because the bus went that way and we picked up kids in Northgate.

**Anne:** We were chatting a little bit off tape, as we were finishing up here, about what recollections you might have about the Gardenland area. Since it was so far away from where you were at least while going to school at American Basin you don't have a lot of memories you're telling us.

**Virginia:** When we were on the school bus going over to Grant High School we would get over into that area. I don't think Northgate Boulevard was called that at the time, but I do remember a group of homes and maybe some shops just in this one area over there. Several children would get on the bus from this area.

**Anne:** Perhaps that road was called the Old Marysville Road.

**Virginia:** I remember, too, when on the bus we would have to stop and wait for a string of planes on trucks coming from McClellan making their way over to the Government Wharf for loading on barges for the war effort. I remember, too, when they widened the highway there to build the wharf and then

widened the highway from that point down the river to Northgate. I can't remember how long the project went on, but the road prior to that was pretty narrow. Roads just were in those days. There was no way in the world they could have gotten those planes to the wharf without widening it.

**Anne:** This is good. I'll have to take a look when I go up there sometime and see where it has been widened. I've taken all this for granted. Now we have the Arden-Garden Connector through there. Well, this has just been so great. I so appreciate your letting us come and do this with you. I'll try my best to do this justice. Thank you again, Virginia.